THE INFINITE MAN AND HIS OPPOSITE.

1.

In Denmark there lived a man. His name was like all the other men who lived in the town which was like all the other towns. He had a job and a car but was young so he did not yet have a wife or family. He had short hair that looked like it had often but cut a week or two before so that it was just growing into the natural shape just the way he liked it. He wore smart shoes when he worked because he worked in a smart office building with glass doors and once a week, on a Saturday afternoon, he wore white and blue trainers and clean jeans with no stains to a big pub where his friends drank stout beer before dinner. He spread butter on his rye with his right hand and liked to think that he had a fine, sharp whistle when he'd drank a big cup of coffee.

All that is to say, this man was unexceptional in any particular way and there was nothing that would have struck you, had you seen him on the street waiting for a taxi or bus, as something strange or extraordinary about him. He was neither more nor less deserving of punishment than anyone else, even though his personal opinion of himself was that this was not the case. He was sure that he had just cause for being subjected to something. In what way he might be a subject of something, and subjected exactly to what he had no further sense. Only it felt obligingly true that when this thing arrived it would be a matter of great significance to himself alone and transform the way that he saw everything whilst leaving public opinion of him completely untouched. Waiting for this to come he was agitated but no more than any one is agitated by their own thoughts and anticipations which line themselves up and disappear like competitive divers queueing for the ten meter drop to submerge themselves and, whilst the next agitation has its go at a perfect ten, the rest make a gracious climb back to the spring board.

Like everyone else when he got agitated he became hungry at irregular times and slept awkwardly so he exercised and cut strawberries out of his diet because the little external seeds irritated his stomach. He did these things because other people had suggested they might help when they noticed he too felt like they

did and implored him to consider this, that, and the other since everyone feels this way, and he is no different from everyone else, and why should it be the case that the particular way he felt could not be calmed by the simple tricks that worked for other people so long as he committedly and habitually stuck to them and controlled other variables that might be affecting him such as sunlight, loud noises, and disturbing imagery with the same sense of appropriate consistency that everyone else could when taking account of these things. Then, and only then, would he find that his agitation was eased and he could begin again to get along like everyone else and he might even begin to feel better than he did before, which is how the kind folk who suggested these changes surely felt, and would enjoy himself more around other people and be excited to share the same possible adaptations in lifestyle and habit management with other people that had benefited him so much when he was feeling agitated as people so often do. More to the point, they might say, he mightn't even be feeling so bad to begin with and was only feeling so forlorn and irritable since he had, himself, got himself into this rut. This, of course, was perfectly natural as people did this all the time and everyone else did this sometimes. Thus, so as not to panic, he must consider that this was actually rather normal and the more normal he could see it to be the easier he would find it to get back to feeling normal, as he considered normal to be, once more. In that case if the diet and/or exercise had not had the alleviating effect they had promised it would have, it was simply the case that there was no need for the transformation since the cause of the irritation was the worrying and rather than succumbing to convincing oneself that there was a dire need for action, some exceptional circumstance that need to be addressed that couldn't possibly be by the usual agreeable order of things that coordinated a man's constitution, he need only keep going with things as they are, acting as if nothing is out of the ordinary, which of course it wasn't since everybody feels so *dans temps de temps*, and in time he would notice that he was not noticing the sensation any longer. Then he would see that he had, in fact, prior to noticing that he no longer noticed his irritation, felt fine the entire time and the irritation was an ordinary, everyday, run of the mill sort of thing to feel so long as he didn't consider it to be of particular interest. It was not peculiar

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until one day, that was a day like any other with twenty four hours beginning and ending at midnight, instead of just feeling his irritable strange self walking around with him all day and wondering if this really was how everyone else felt, he began to notice something very strange whilst walking home from work, since he had stopped driving to work as per the recommendations of his colleague who suggested this as a way he could begin to feel normal in the way he usually did. He was especially tired that day since it was either at the very start of the week where he then felt most tired of all as all the people at his work, client and colleagues, seemed to be most tired then and an infectious yawning fever seemed to get around from one office to the next without respect for the walls in its way. It makes sense that people would be most tired at the start of the week, they all said, since everyone was tired from the weekend and tired that the full week was still ahead of them so that they might yawn was functional behaviour. In this expectedly tired state of, to what felt like this man, a very particularly weighty tiredness, he laboured home slowly. The fresh air of the walk, which was not particularly cold or blustering, did little to lift his spirits and his legs dragged more the further he walked. Eventually he began to feel very strange, especially different to the sort of irritable strange he usually felt, and when he was finally forced to come to a stop altogether, he watched in stupor as he saw himself also continue to walk ahead in front of himself at a normal and healthy pace while he himself stood still on the street in the mild grey light of a late day. The body walked ahead, did not turn, and made haste in the direction of the man's house which stood at the end of a neat cul-de-sac.

When he eventually regained his wits and followed the direction he had watched himself go in he entered his house and shut the door to find himself already sat in his favourite seat, with a slice of buttered rye and a cup of tea preparing to read for a short while from the book ‘The next now’, a short non-fiction pulp that speaks on the significance of rest and future thinking in modern living. The

book was a gift from a friend who suggested reading when he gets home from work to help alleviate the transition from one environment to another since reading was sensorily calming but activated parts of the brain which everyone had.
After a brief moment of stupor the man decided that the best course of action, which he would surely be advised by anyone else, was to not concern himself so much with the extraordinary reality that a second version of himself was now sitting in his chair and reading his book but, rather, to choose another seat and another book and get on with his evening as per usual otherwise he would be late for tennis.

When he went to bed that evening, he was already in there fast asleep and so he got in next to himself, being careful not to touch and disturb his own sleeping, and slept as soundly as he could knowing that these things happen to everyone and it was important that he got eight hours of sleep otherwise he would feel especially irritable at work tomorrow and, probably, he would fall asleep earlier the next day thus throwing his sleep schedule out of sorts. In the morning he got out of bed and there were two of him still lying down. He tried to wake them but they did not seem to notice him and instead in an inexplicable way superimposed over each other like one image impressed on top of another in a digitally edited photograph where parts of the one had been overlaid onto the other so that both appeared to be occupying the same space at the same time.

They both got up within a few seconds of each other and went about their days as one might. Wake up, shower, clothes, brush teeth, breakfast, watch TV, head to work, see.
Ashamed to admit that even amongst company exactly the same as himself he might be the oddball, the man also had a shower, waiting for the other two to finish their business and instead opting to brush his teeth first whilst their still overlapping selves washed slightly asynchronously. He looked at himselves washing.

At work, so as not to concern any of his colleagues with this strange predicament, he followed the actions of the second and third selves, allowing himself in hesitancy to be overlaid with them when he noticed that it appeared no one else could see them. All the better, he thought, they also could not hear them typing on the keys which did not produce letters on the screen or answering a phone that was not ringing. These overdubs of himself persisted with their day, acting metronomically and cleanly exactly as he would have but seemingly not influencing the rest of the tangible world at all. They buttered their rye for lunch and ate it but the butter was no more shallow for it and they urinated in the same bowel but no urine gathered at the bottom of it.

He got into bed, disintegrating into his other selves on the comfortable mattress and pulled the covers over the three of them equally so that no one would get cold. He tried to sleep deeply but the previous night's awkwardness must have put off his sleep schedule and so he persistently woke up in the night, noticing that one of his doubles was sometimes also awake at similar times and sitting in a very similar position. It comforted him to know that, of course, he felt like everyone else did and these things also happened to other people too and after that he slept much better.
The next day he again stood and waited, brushing his teeth while the other selves rubbed and sang silently in the shower, sometimes aligning entirely with each other and merging in a confluence into one single person and then breaking out into an eight limbed demigod before entirely splitting apart as they dropped a bottle of hair conditioner in different corners of the little shower cubicle, bending down so that only their alternate, left and right, buttock remained in faze, overlapped with each other. Then, suddenly, he saw his body bend to the left and spit into the sink by his side just before he thought to do so himself.
He stepped purposefully backwards a few yards and saw himself, yesterday, watching his tangled others clamber out the shower and put a towel down so they did not slip on the nicely tiled floor.

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Thus, on the man went, reproducing himself day after day with remarkable consistency and regularity. He could not tell if it was a certain time at night that the new image appeared since there were so many of himself in the bed by this point that instead of a tangle of arms and legs there appeared rather a spectographic, granulated cloud of little bits of elbow, skin, and nail covering every inch of the mattress. When he stood to urinate in the morning he could no longer see the bowl behind the echoing spread of his own thighs and penis hanging over the blank ceramic seat for whom he suddenly felt a great pity at its lot in life. What a privilege it is to be a plate or a mug he thought, and what must one have done to deserve to be a basin.

Indeed, the bathroom was soon completely covered in himself as each day he tried to step back or on his tip toes or put the toilet seat down, after they were all done urinating, to stand on it and get a look at how full the room was getting.

He tried to slow or increase his pace of walking on the way to work each day so as to be able to check behind himself to see if anything noticeable was happening to any of his former selves but all this resulted in was him having to do a sprint of a little greater distance each day to overtake the previous several weeks that had, by this point, accumulated, and he would run very hard in smart work shoes only to stop on the spot and turn to see tens of himself stopping and turning or still sprinting and stopping a little nearer to his office. In time, he thought, I shall have to run all the way to work just to see myself arrive.

At work and at tennis, or at the pub on a Saturday, still no one seemed to notice and he assumed that, despite not seeing the many versions of himself in the room with them, they had noticed that his behaviour had changed slightly they would not comment as this was not so out of the ordinary since everybody felt that way sometimes, they would say to themselves, and surely this man, with blue trainers and grass stained jeans, is much like everyone else in that he seems slightly different from time to time. Moreover, the gradual and incremental fashion in which his behaviour may have seemed to be changing, indeed he was

not even certain if his behaviour was changing since he could see all of his past selves who seemed to be acting fairly normally, likely obscured the fact that it had changed at all and only a sudden and drastic instance might indicate to other people that every night he reproduced his previous self in his sleep.

Indeed, this consideration of other people set him wondering if he was reproducing himself at all and instead, since his prior selves did not disturb the material world, they were a kind of projection of his memory into the present. He had always had a good memory and could remember all sorts of things from before the age of five, even though he would be much older than that in a few years, which people liked to remind him was a neat thing.
Alternatively, what if rather than watching his own memory overlay day after day upon itself, he was physically reproducing but that each day he crawled outside of his former self and, having considered himself all this time to have been an original, he was in fact no more than a day old, and at some point in his sleep each night he detached from his past self. That would mean the first duplicate, whom he watched walk away on that standardly tired day, was his true self and would now be impossible to find, obscured beneath a mass of repetitions.

It began to trouble him until one day he had a bright idea. Whilst at the pub one fine Saturday afternoon, drinking stouts before dinner, he had been tempted by a friend to stay for one more before going home to eat, something not exactly inconspicuous nor entirely outside of the realms of possibility for a Saturday afternoon with good sunshine and this particular friend.
Having stayed at the pub for an extra stout he suddenly found himself completely alone, all of his prior Saturday afternoon selves gone home already. Perhaps it was the excitement of having been left alone, if only for a short while, or the revelry of having had one more stout than usual but he decided before finishing his one more than usual that he may as well have another after that!

Well, this idea went down very well and quickly led to the even better thought that it was still early and the sun had left enough of itself to warm the oncoming evening so the fact that he didn't have a coat wasn't a problem. Why not stay and have dinner in the pub as well?
So he did. And another stout after that, and a rye whisky, and a sloe gin, and a baby guinness, and a little shandy, and a wheat beer, and a half-pint of welsh cider, and a little carafe of house white and then finally back onto the stouts, this time with extra creamy foam on the head since the evening shift had come to the pub, and the new barman pulled them extra thick.

The man slept soundly at the table in the pub and woke up the next day with conviction. It was Sunday but he did not need to be anywhere and he would not go to work on Monday or the day after that but he decided that he did not have to be anywhere at all really. He sat at the table in the pub completely still and not wondering anymore what he was subject too or what subject he might take up but that he would sit completely still day after day and let himself amass into an astonishing and turgid heft of man on the pub bench each repeating itself and either remembering each of the previous days sitting there or biologically accumulating more and more of himself, crawling outside of himself and into the same spot in the bench all without moving, without sleeping, without blinking for as many days as could be the case.

Now, this went on for several days, weeks, months perhaps and the bar staff thought it was neither here nor there and did not disturb the man for it was not out of the ordinary to see a well dressed man fall from grace after a single night of heavy drinking and spend the rest of his days lingering in the pub. So they paid him no mind and let him sit and reproduce in chronic fashion on the chair at the table in the pub until, on one slightly busier than usually day but still not especially busy for a nice, cosy, centrally located pub in this town like all other towns, a chubby sweet faced lad came up to the man and asked of him if he was waiting for someone or could he take the seat opposite him. Now for all his drinking and sitting and reproducing the man didn't want to give the impression that he was being rude, and especially he didn't want the young lad

to think he was being rude out of angst over some bizarre instance that had led to him into behaving in a strange way, which he himself knew himself not to be behaving in since he could see all of his past selves. Instead he very much obligingly stood up and offered the lad both the seats to take over to his table of friends.
The lad thanked him kindly and with two podgy strong arms lifted both chairs and toddled over to his mates round the other side of the bar.

The man stood and looked down at himselves. They were many and few. They were almost exactly in one unified form were it not for little flickers of twitches and sways that formed a micro film like aura and sheen around the outside of his body indicating his ever so slight movement throughout his still sitting. He was no longer clean shaven and his hair had grown far past the point of being nicely grown into just how he liked it.
He walked around to see himselves from other angles. There he sat with no chair beneath him and no beer in front of him, thoughtless and waiting.

He realised, retrospectively, that he had just given his seat to a kindly young man and then proceeded to stand and stare intently at the spot where the seat no longer was but had been for the weeks he had sat there in it. This typically would be considered slightly strange behaviour but given that he had been in a pub for several weeks perhaps not and, at this point in time he no longer cared. He felt the care shift and tremble out of him like salt by osmosis.

He thought to himself, it does not matter if they think I am so strange or if I am only strange for thinking that they might. Nor if they can see myselves or if only I impose them on the world by remembering my being there. Rather they will not interpret any of these things from me and will likely assume a host of others without my even knowing it. I would go so far as to say, he thought, that they know absolutely nothing about me at all for, as I can see looking closer than ever before, I am just a man like any other.